

Cashing in Research grants speak well of state

IT WAS about six months ago that a blue-ribbon panel commissioned by the governor suggested a major way to foster economic development in Oklahoma was to make our state the "research capital of the Plains." We're getting there.

The panel's recommendation to create a \$1 billion endowment to support research is going to take time. A more immediate step in that direction came in Tuesday's announcement of \$30 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health, to be used for biomedical research at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

The \$17.95 million for the health sciences center and the \$12 million for the foundation are the most ever awarded to those entities by the NIH. Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Warr Acres, who helped secure the funding, says no other state has received more NIH research grants so far this year.

Officials say the grants could translate into as many as 90 jobs and might even result in development of a biomedical research company. That's worth cheering. So too is the fact the NIH dollars will allow researchers to delve further into health issues that affect so many of us.

With the grant money it is receiving, the OU Health Sciences Center will conduct research tied to various types of cancer, look at how women are affected by the decline of estrogen in their system, and will study microbiology and neurosciences. The OMRF grants will allow 10 scientists to take a closer look at lupus and other autoimmune diseases.

OU President David Boren said NIH funding is considered "the ultimate measure of research quality." Foundation President Dr. J. Donald Capra said the grants help develop the "critical mass" of bright, well-funded scientists the state must have if it's to be a major player in medical research.

Clearly the NIH is aware of Oklahoma, and that bodes well for the state's future research endeavors.